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I. Geographical Introduction

- 131 The habitation and roaming area of the Surá and Pakidai lies between the Demini and Aracá rivers -- a terra incognita within the large area between Río Branco, Río Uraricuera, Serra Parima, and Río Negro, which up to now has been so little opened up ethnologically and geographically.
- 133 The Río Demini is a left tributary of the middle Río Negro. Its source is in the Serra Parima, in the Brazilian-Venezuelan border area, and its mouth is just above Barcelos, the former capital of "Capitania do Rio Negro." The water of this river is white, whereas the numerous lakes along its banks and all its
- 133 134 tributaries, such as the Aracá, a right tributary of the lower Demini, have black water. The tributaries of the Aracá, on the other hand, are characterized by clear water. This peculiarity is connected with soil conditions, soil erosion, and the topography of the catchment areas. Thus, soil erosion in very mountainous terrain causes a light coloring, whereas in a very flat, swampy region dark humus substances overflow into the water and darken it. It is further noteworthy that black water is healthier and
- 133 136 tastier and, in standing, does not leave a dirty sediment. Even water turtles and fish that have lived in black water are tastier than the same animals taken from white-water rivers or lakes. Moreover, it should be pointed out that mosquitoes appear in considerably smaller numbers along black water than along white. On the Río Demini one can scarcely defend oneself from the small piuns (Simulium sp., day gnats) and the large carapanãs (Anopheles); the latter are the dangerous malaria-carriers. The lower course and part of the middle course are therefore completely fever-infested.
- 137 The two types of water also result in different kinds of vegetation. Characteristic for the Río Demini are the igapós (inundated forests with tall trees standing close together), between which there is very seldom any terra firma. On the higher banks of the Aracá, however, one finds primarily low scrub-forest. The

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Because of the nearness of the equator, it is very hot, humid, and oppressive in this region, yet not unbearable. For, on account of the high moisture content of the air, there is, for example, no heat prostration and no sunstroke here. One can also sleep quite well at night, since the temperature then drops several degrees and is accompanied by a refreshing breeze. During the day the temperature of the air comes to 32-36° and at night 24-28°, whereas that of the water is usually between 29-32°.

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As a result of the scarcity of human beings that prevails here, there are a great many wild animals and birds in the forests, in addition to the abundance of water turtles, caymans, and fish in the rivers, several species of which will be enumerated in the following:

- a) Mammals: spotted jaguar (Felis onca L.), black jaguar (Panthera onca L.), puma (Felis concolor), maracajá (Felis pardalis Neuw.), tapir (Tapirus americanus Briss.), deer (Cervidae sp.), wild pig (Pecari tajacu), capybara (Hydrochoerus hydrochaeris Erx.), paca (Cuniculus paca L.), cutia (Dasyprocta aguti L.), armadillo (Dasypodidae sp.), sloth (Bradypus sp.), ant bear (Myrmecophaga sp.) monkeys, such as the howling monkey (Alouatta sp.), cuxiú-negro (Chiroptes satanas Humb.), cuatá (Ateles paniscus L.), macaco-da-noite (Aotus infulatus), etc., sea cow (Trichechus inunguis Desmaret), etc.
- b) Birds: mutum (Crax sp.), urumutum (Crax sp.), mutum-cavalo (Mitu mitu L.), jacamim (Psophia crepitans L.), cujubim (Pipile pipile cajubi Pelz.), jacu (Penelope sp.), japim (Cacicus cela L.), inambu (Crypturellus sp.), inambu-relógio (Crypturellus strigulosus Temm.), toucan (Rhamphastus /3/ sp.), arara vermelha (Ara macao L.), arara amarela (Ara ararauna L.), papagaio moleiro (Amazona sp.), papagaio curica (Amazona sp.), garça branca (Casmerodius albus egretta Gm.), gavião-real (Thrasaetus harpyia L.), gavião-caipira (Hypomorphnus urubitinga urubitinga Gm.), urubus (Cathartes foetens, Cathartes aura, etc.), etc.
- c) Water turtles: tracajá (Emys sp.), cabeçuda (Podocnemis dumeriliana), etc.
- d) Land turtles: jabuti (Testudo tabulata Woelb.), etc.

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- 136 e) Caymans: jacaretinga or jacaré-de-óculos (Caiman sclerpos Schneid.), etc.
- f) Fish: aracu (Leporinus copelandi Steind.), piranha (Pygocentrus sp. and Serrasalmus sp.), pirarucu (largest fresh-water fish, reaches a length of over three meters; belongs to the family of the bone-tongues (Osteoglossidae). The hard tongue serves as a grater for Indians and whites), piraíba (Brachyplatystoma filamentosa), surubim (Platystoma sp.), jandiá (Sciluridae sp.), mandi (Rhamdia sp.), curimata (Prochilodus sp.), pescada (Gadus sp.), dourado (Salminus brevidens), tambaqui (Characinidae sp.), mandubi (Auchenipteridae sp.), anujá (Trachycoristes sp.), cuiúcuíu (Oxidorus niger Vall.), etc.

There are also snakes in large numbers:

- a) Nonpoisonous snakes: sucuriçu (Eunectes murinus), jibóia-vermelha (Epicrates cenchris), etc.
- b) Poisonous snakes: surucucu (Lachesis muta L.), cascavel (Crotalus terrificus terrificus), jararaca (Lachesis sp.), jararacussu (Bothrops jararacussu Lacerda), cobra-coral (Elaps corallinus Wied.), etc.

II. The Civilized Inhabitants of the Demini-Aracá Region

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In the case of the civilized population, which lives along the lower and middle course, there is a mixture of Indians, whites, Negroes, and mulattoes who make a living as rubber gatherers, palm-fiber gatherers, woodcutters, fishermen, and planters.

Rubber gatherers work exclusively in the Demini river basin, palm-fiber gatherers and woodcutters only in the Aracá region. Planters, fishermen, and a few ambulant traders may be found on terra firma along both rivers. While the rubber gatherers on the Demini live in families far apart from one another, the distances are 10-20 kilometers and more, the woodcutters and palm-fiber gatherers along the Aracá have joined together in small settlements.

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carrying baskets. -- Of the fruits of the wild cacao tree (Theobroma sp.) -- boroí --, which has many branches and whose foliage is dense and dark, only the sweet pith of the husks is sucked out, while the beans, which played such an important part among the high-culture peoples of Central America, are carelessly thrown away (363). -- The apple-like fruit of the lucuma tree

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363. Zerries reports the same thing of the Waiká, and here the names are "loa" or "bohóloa" (Zerries, 1956b, p. 150; Zerries, 1958c, p. 177).

(Lucuma macrocarpa Hub.) -- kumató -- is valued for its sweetish, gelatinous pulp that surrounds the pit; the /79/ outer meat of the fruit and the shell, on the other hand, has a very bitter, unpleasant taste. -- The fruit of the wild pineapple, which only reaches the size of a medium-sized apple, is also eaten with relish.

The pods of the pacova sororoca, a Musaceae species (Ravenala guianensis Benth.) -- mokohé -- (364), gathered espe-

364. The pacova-sororoca is often erroneously called "wild banana" because its large leaves, which resemble those of the banana trees.

cially frequently, contribute more to the everyday food. -- When there is an occasional food shortage during the rainy season, the flat brown fruits of the pot tree (Lecythis longifolia), which are called uapú by the Suráa and kurupú by the Pakidái, are appreciated to this day (365).

365. The Waiká have the name "wabu" for them (Zerries, 1956b, p. 149; Zerries, 1958c, p. 177; Barker, 1953, p. 443).

Besides these most important vegetable products that are gathered, there are also a great many animal ones. To be named here above all is the honey of several species of small bees (366)

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366. There are said to be more than 20 different varieties of them.

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* 123 Sempronio—this was the name we had given to an Auai boy who had elected to stay with us.

* 123 We made our way up the river of the same name which plunges down from the highlands, with wonderful falls, into a ravine thick with vegetation. The Shirians were strongly disinclined to go anywhere near the falls. It took us three days to overcome their objections and they only decided to go along with us when we told them we should otherwise set off by ourselves. Luis Antonio explained that the deep pool formed by the waterfall was the home of an enormous water snake, *Lalakilpara*—a monster which lay coiled in readiness to devour anyone or anything it saw looking over the edge of the pool.

We laughed, but as far as the Indians were concerned our laughter fell on deaf ears. Luis Antonio was no exception, and he warned us not to jest about certain things. Numerous trails made by tapir and peccary were pointed out to us as paths the serpent had taken. One curious thing about the monster which remained unexplained was that he came regularly along the river-bank to the Kirisochi savannah for his excretions. But at last the Indians overcame their reluctance enough to make an inspection of the pool. Dumbfounded, they had to admit that *Lalakilpara* didn't exist, except as a highly coloured fiction among their older kinsfolk, who could recount the monster's whole history. It seemed to us that the power of fancy had transformed a few cross-currents driven furiously against the walls of the gorge by the whirlpool set up by the tumbling water, into this gigantic serpent whose breath—the air-disturbance—could suck down any man or beast who went too near the edge of the precipice. As to the distance the monster covered for purposes of nature, the symbolism here was even clearer: what it sought to explain was the way in which the river's alluvial matter found its way to the Kirisochi plain. The water was calmer by the time it reached this point, and the detritus carried along with it tended to be deposited here. This fable of the serpent was an example of a natural phenomenon stated in terms of myth—the only such example we found among the Shirians. After we had exploded the legend, *Lalakilpara* slowly died away in the Indian mind, his place being taken by the aeroplane and the outboard motor—monsters no less fantastic, and no less dread.

* 123 The slopes of the Sarisariflama range were very poor in wild life, as is often the case with these mountains, and Luis Antonio, to whom we had given a gun after he had proved himself to be a better shot than we were, was only able to get a Capuchin monkey or two. We boiled them—the result being a murky

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133 the forest lands, and their tops are so high and so difficult of access that this has helped to preserve a biological world completely distinct not only from that of the surrounding lowlands of the Caroni, Paragua, Caura, and Orinoco valleys but also from that common to all other valleys in the American continent. A few decades ago, when the aeroplane first enabled us to study these regions and their geological peculiarities, some observers proceeded to formulate wild theories which aroused more legitimate emotions in the breasts of explorers and scientists.

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The formation of sandstone and conglomerate which overlays the original basic rock of this region to a depth of 2,500 metres was eroded almost completely on the periphery of these uplands, leaving the great flat-topped mountains isolated. This geological phenomenon began in the Secondary Era, when the plant and animal life on our planet was appreciably different from what it is today. The process of erosion continued right down to the ancient granite crust, while on the uplands flora and fauna continued as hitherto, restricted now to their new isolation. Communication between the heights and the plain became impossible. The pressure at 2,500 metres is very different from what it is at four hundred, and creates peculiar physiological changes in the organisms that adapt themselves to it.

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114 It seemed possible that the flat tops of these mountains, which from the air appeared to be covered with bush, would not only reveal unknown vegetable species but also animals which scientists believed to be extinct. Perhaps certain monsters from the Mesozoic age—the Saurians, it might be, the inspiration of so many fantasies—still lived and pastured in deep chasms scooped out by the waters of ages. Speculation wove many a scientific fantasy.

137 In reality, the monsters remained well and truly buried in their geological strata and no mountain could preserve forms of life surviving through a radical change of atmospheric and geological conditions. What did come as a surprise, however, on these mountains—and the Sarisarifama itself proved the point—was an entirely individual flora: orchids, epiphytes, bromeliads and lianas of hitherto unknown types, which are likely to keep botanical students busy for a long time all over the world.

136 The usual fly-catchers, merry little birds I had already known closely on other high Guiana mountains, came to greet us. Never having seen animals bigger than themselves, these birds took us for strange trees with two big humid flowers distilling honey at the top: our eyes. First one of them came

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

along by himself and hopped round us twittering. Then he flew off, to return a little while later with another in tow—perhaps the hen bird. Twittering again, he presented us to her as a fabulous discovery. They twittered a commentary and flew off, returning a little later, this time with a whole flock of friends. Then, with the courage that comes with numbers, they all made for our eyes to get at the honey. We were forced to disillusion them.

VIII

The Shirians have tobacco, *pikni* as they call it: even the most primitive and savage of them, the Samatari, cultivate two things in some hidden corner of the forest known only to themselves—tobacco, and the cane from which they make their arrows. Vice and war!

We were highly attracted towards the Uagna river lands, which, according to Luis Antonio, was country rich in game and inhabited, or at least occasionally crossed, by the Samatari, who inspired terror all round them. Enrico, Momi, and I set out on an expedition there, leaving Jean and Artur to wait for the plane.

We stopped on the way at the Uarema settlement; Luis Antonio wanted to show us off to his people, who had never seen men with beards and wearing clothes.

That night we slept in a crowded hut, and our curiosity was drawn towards a young woman who had strung her hammock between those of Uarema's two nephews (whose persons were adorned with feathers and plumes). She stayed in all day as well, a cosseted Shirian Cleopatra, continually looking at herself in the little glass we had given her and adjusting the white feather boa which covered her ears and her shoulders. During the course of the day other women came to help her with her toilet, painting her cheeks and forehead with certain precise geometrical designs: they used red and black colouring matter which when dry shone like enamel. Even her little quid of tobacco was smaller and daintier than others used. Uarema told us that she was the public woman of the tribe.

Next morning, when we were stepping into our boats again, Pancho and Benito came along in a big canoe. They wanted salt from us. We had very little, and had to refuse them. They went off in silence. When they were two hundred yards away, they shouted something in our direction. Luis Antonio

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123 replied. Another shout was hurled at us. This repartee continued for some time, till Pancho and his brothers disappeared round a bend in the river. Our guide gave us a rough and ready translation of the insults exchanged.

'Let go these bad men,' Pancho had advised. 'These bad men who won't give us salt.'

'I won't let them go, because they give me salt right enough,' Luis Antonio had replied.

'Let go of them. They're bad men.'

'No, I won't let go. They're good.'

'Let them go, or else next time I see you, you and your people, I'll put an arrow in your belly.'

'And I'll call up their aeroplane, and see your whole village goes up in smithereens with the Catholic Bomb!'

A certain linguistic confusion led the Shirians to call the '*bomba atomica*' the '*bomba cattolica*'.

[136] Our return journey was a triumph of navigation, and our boats were full of smoked venison. We saw many deer grazing in shallows where the tobacco-coloured waters were flecked with patches of green. A little while before we came out on to the Merevari, Uarema pointed out to us a gap or hole in the wall of forest. He said it was the 'gateway to the Samatari'. The river at once took on an atmosphere of mystery: through the smooth green cliffs of bamboo and kapok trees which towered up from the banks there breathed the chill wind of legendary evil.

We got back to our savannah to find the American girl, Jean, suffering from hysterical fits. Heavy rains had begun. Mountain and forest were veiled in greenish grey. Kirisochi became a swamp. From the Sarisarifama falls came a thunder that was like the voice of lands unexplored, an invitation to new voyages. A great project began to take shape in my mind.

Jean and Artur might wish to get back to civilization: Momi and Giovanni too. But Enrico and I had no intention of returning. For us, the expedition wouldn't really have begun until we were on our own, free to follow any course that took our fancy. An irresistible goal now lay before us: the land of the Samatari.

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next valley, along spur which inexplicably began to rise again between streams rushing madly in all directions, now away from us, now towards us, now to one side, now to the other, as if we had lost our sense of balance and were spinning round and round.

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Game was extremely scarce and the gun which Luis Antonio had brought went, alas, unused. This was a serious state of affairs: we had nothing in the way of rations but a little salt and were relying on hunting and finding fruit. Fishing in these tiny rushing streams was not likely to yield much. We had hardly anything with us except the gun, a hundred cartridges, our hammocks for the night and a few medical supplies—not so much for ourselves as for any Indians we met with, for experience had taught us that even the most ferocious of them would respond in friendly fashion and be grateful if we cured the sick. So there we were with our few rags of clothes, carrying our mystic handful of salt, humbly and nakedly challenging the great world of the wilds—those thirty-two hills, inhabited perhaps by strange creatures and criss-crossed with clear streams running in all directions. And out of the very humility of our position in the face of such tremendous odds we drew our hopes for the success of our undertaking, as if we were instinctively conscious of a fundamental justice in the life of the forest, which would not deny us its bounty.

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Some touch of enchantment, as in a legend, there must have been about us: the animals themselves seemed sensitive to it—those few at least who roamed these hills. The first morning we woke among the trees—we had camped on the bank of a sizeable stream which according to Hashimo flowed into the Uagna—I looked out of our rough shelter to see a lead-grey puma start silently by the water. The creature had the same contented look in his eyes as a dog has when going for a walk. I felt no alarm. I just watched quietly, with no thought of grabbing my gun or calling the others. After giving me a long, brotherly, understanding look, the puma crossed a little clear space and went off slowly, as he had come, through the cane-brake.

So-called fierce wild animals see in man a dangerous competitor and they don't want anything to do with him. We often chanced to strike a region across which there never had been any paths or trails. The first night as we settled down to sleep we could hear the screaming of wildcat, the roar of jaguars and the odd cry of the puma which sounds something like a night-bird's call. But by the next day all sound from the wild beasts had ceased. The scent of man had driven them away.

CAPTURED BY THE SAMATARI

Among the Indians generally, and the northern Guayca tribes, there is a curious method of keeping wild animals at a distance which is based on this knowledge. They search round the streams for traces of the path the animals use when they go to drink. Then they scatter it with human excrement. If one of the creatures comes back that way, he will suddenly go bounding off across the width of the valley to seek refuge in the rocky heart of the mountain, such is his terror of the very traces of man. 825

Before we reached one table-topped hill which we had glimpsed from the last high point, Uarema killed an agouti. We ate it straight away, with a few palm hearts from San Paulo palm trees which Sempronio and Solituan—the youngest and oldest members of our expedition—gathered as we went along, and carried with them like bunches of flowers. We camped on the sandstone heights, where the vegetation had thinned out and was soft and mossy, with great clusters of Spanish moss, drenched with water, clinging to the tree-trunks, orchids growing on the ground and curtains of lichen hanging from the trees instead of the lianas found at lower levels. 123* 487

And with the change of vegetation at this altitude, there was a change of atmosphere also. From the warm, heavy air of the plain, where one could feel a lush exuberance of life swelling the sap of every plant and setting a myriad little animals in motion, you passed to a region of cold silence, only broken at regular intervals by the lugubrious chant of the bell-bird, a bird with an astoundingly long white tail which, from concealment among the bushes, gives a call of long, mournful, metallic ring. (136) ●

After our high spirits of the first day out, which the luxuriant life of the forest had sent even higher, now, on the heights, we were invaded by a sort of melancholy acceptance of these cool solitudes and their touch of death. We wanted to drop down again, to camp in some little valley where the chances of encountering animals were always greater; but the hour was very late, and we had to stay where we were for the night, on the south side. From here, as far as the eye could see, the humps of the mountains stretched out before us as we peered through the trees. They were covered with a thick dark green vegetation, absolutely uniform, and underneath it a hundred little streams drained into marshy depressions. Hashimo pointed out the hills with his usual gesture. Before we reached the Samatari, there were still eighteen more, or so we thought.

6: Vinci T-5 (1950) 1959 SQ18 Yanoama SQ18
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14. On the river Fagua: a clock.

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6: Vinci T-5 (1950) 1959 SQ18 Yanoama SQ18
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20. The heron.

[p. 96-G]

Our chief occupations were the louse and the

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● (136) fleas—the penetrating variety, *Afroamericana nigra*, which keeps everybody's feet busy in the equatorial zones of our globe every bit as effectively as the dances that originate there. Americana is not such a bad animal as his African brother, the jigger, though he is more plentiful. Indian feet are full of him, and the open craters in the horny, almost bony patches forming the ball of the foot are evidence of the constant care they take to keep open the little insects' snug lairs and prevent him from taking up permanent residence.

[262] The eradication of lice is carried out at a family or social gathering in a spirit of mutual aid. Men and women will all sit round together in a circle making a thorough inspection of one another's thick hair till they come upon the black louse crouching there silently, like a peccary surprised in the forest, among the roots of the hairs. He is taken between two fingers and disposed of in the simplest fashion: he is eaten. The same privilege is accorded to the eggs, which like all eggs must taste delicious. The nigra can be dealt with by oneself but female collaboration is nevertheless appreciated. A soft, gentle hand—Samatari ladies have exceedingly small hands and feet—introduces a pin (presented by us) or a splinter of Corozo palm (presented by the forest) into the little nest. The white grub of this accursed insect then emerges into the light of day, but the fate reserved for it is not a human end. It is thrown to the fish, which come along in shoals for the fat tit-bit.

* 123 We had no soap, and during these halts the best we could do was to splash water over ourselves. The Samatari were not interested in following our example: rain gave them the only baths they ever took. We couldn't even swim to get clean, as we had done in the 'black water' rivers higher up, because there was danger lurking here beneath the harmless-looking surface.

136 The perils of tropical rivers are five in number—five major perils, that is, because the minor ones, like the amoeba and other parasites, may loom large among the fads and fancies of medical men but do not form part of the psychological baggage of the explorer.

The cayman is king of these perils. His reign is uncontested. His body may be anything up to thirteen feet long, solid and impregnable as a crest of rock. Almost equal in rank is peril number two—the anaconda or water-serpent: if the cayman is king, the anaconda is certainly queen. She is a wonderful monster, up to ten yards in length, with all the force of a hurricane. And being a reptile, the anaconda has all the virtues of the reptiles, enhanced by her aquatic habits, which make her cleaner and nobler than them all.

AT HOME WITH THE SAMATARI

The poisonous ray with the sting in its tail lies crouched on the bottom, 136 ● scarcely distinguishable in colour from the sand. The incautious man who puts his foot on it is immediately stung and suffers the most acute pain he has ever felt. In this connection, we may mention an interesting cure which the natives of Guiana resort to for ray-stings. They poultice the affected region with a compress soaked in water used for washing the intimate parts of a woman during her menstrual period. This cure has yet to be verified scientifically, but we hope matters will remain as they are. Why should the people be deprived of a remedy at once so cheap, so exotic—and so successful? (752)

That freshwater electric eel, *gimnoto americano*, awaits its prey in the hopes of transmitting some of its excess electricity, which accumulates in its belly-batteries, charged during its periods of rest by the current passing from the anode of the rocky bottom to its own cathode. It is a short, thick eel with an ugly expression as though it had a set of false teeth, probably due to its compressed energy, a nervous force denied an outlet, and also undeniably caused by the glaring injustice of Man. For Man has raised monuments to Volta and Faraday which would more fittingly have honoured the electric eel.

Last—and most frequent—of the five classic perils, is that carnivorous fish known in Brazil as the *piraia* and in Venezuela as the *caribe*. In seething, ant-like swarms it will lie impatiently waiting for its bloody prey: and while waiting, just to keep in training, it will devour its own kind. Carnivorous fish are not all of the same species: actually almost all freshwater fish in the tropics are carnivorous, even the most innocent of them, and I recall now that the best way to clean up certain wound or infected places is to dip the part into a shallow stretch of river water. Crowds of the most sympathetic little fish will come along sniffing and nibbling, and they will clean up the wound in such a way as to strike envy into any surgeon's heart. But there are also fish that will nip off a finger, or any soft part, at one fell swoop—as often happens to the diamond workers when they dive into deep pockets in search of diamonds.

Generally speaking, the five perils we have mentioned, evil genii of the plain, are not met with in waters at a higher altitude. These they cannot reach because of the rapids which bar the way, and they would be unable to survive there in any case, the water being too cold for them. Only the king of them all, the cayman, permits himself to send his more modest envoys up into the higher regions—alligators of tranquil character and appetizing flesh. And the anacondas will, from time to time, allow her little ones, who are eager to get to

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- 136 know the world, a few excursions into those terrible waters where the very absence of peril means, for these lowland monsters, the greatest peril of all.

* 123 [609] The Samatari had now got quite used to having us in their midst and their primitive fear of us—the emotion which gives rise to an instinctive urge to kill—had disappeared utterly. The fear strangers evoke in them is twofold: they are afraid of being killed, and of having their womenfolk raped. We hadn't killed anybody, and the women did not attract us. We left them in peace, even when they were driven by their insatiable professional curiosity to inspect our private parts.

From being merely tolerated, therefore, we soon passed quite naturally to the stage of having a rather more positive value placed upon us. Soon we were superior beings who had chosen their tribe as the privileged recipients of our friendship. This was without a doubt an auspicious sign for them, and one they must profit by. For the moment the profit which the medicine-man had in mind related only to matters appertaining to magic and moral spheres and had nothing to do with our persons. We ourselves, indeed, were not called upon to play an active part.

* 123 756 789 782 Ceremonies of propitiation were enacted at night. The medicine-man would sit in his hammock with his feet dangling over the fire, invoking prosperity for his own people and ruin and death for their enemies (who were doing the same thing, in the same spirit, at the same moment, in some other corner of the forest). But the Samatari had us with them: the effect of their invocations would travel far and fast, like the explosion of the *bombard*.

* 123 533 756 789 The medicine-man would suddenly sit up in his hammock as if he was cold, and after burling something incomprehensible, slowly shout out the name of a fruit—for instance, *monama*. The last syllable was held for some time, with modulations that reminded me of an echo rebounding from hill to hill. When this solo was over the men's chorus—they were all sitting round the fire in their hammocks, too—would take up the refrain, reciting a long litany full of mournful verses. According to the brief explanations given by Luis Antonio, the gist of it was: much *monama* for the Samatari and none for their enemies. Let hunger strike them down. They are bad men. A moment's silence would

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always filled me with pride. By setting about it in the right way we can always manage to make ourselves acceptable to our superiors, but no such effort will ensure the same result with people more lowly placed than we are: for this, the all-important thing is to possess a natural bent, a certain humility of spirit and a sympathetic understanding. One must possess the faculty of becoming, up to a certain point, 'primitive' oneself, adopting all the healthiest attributes of the primitive state, without at the same time losing one's own value as a civilized being: one must be primitive and something more—not just the 'something more' alone, which rather amounts to something less.

114 It often happens that scientific expeditions, or explorers of one sort or another, venture into regions inhabited by primitive men with the intention of studying them. They approach them with all the preconceived and presumptuous notions of men who have read up all there is on the subject, and every single human being who shows up on the river-bank becomes a savage and must be catalogued like a butterfly. Thus the Shirians in all their slightly different types and sub-divisions are all called 'Guaharibos'—a name which means nothing and which the Shirians themselves have never heard. These scientific explorers may indeed take measurements of their faces and calculate the number of red corpuscles in their blood: the Shirians remain Sanema for all that—people living in their own forest land, fighting their battles for their own special reasons, but ready to become men just like any others—because with a completeness and a simplicity that surpasses our own, they are men already. But scientific records lump the Sanema and the Soto together under the barbarian headings of Guaharibo and Magnungòn, both contemptuous epithets, and humanity learns nothing from these explorers with their solar topees, who have scarcely got back to civilization after spending a few months in the forest and learning all there is to be known about the savages before they start writing books about it. If these books could be read and understood by the primitive people they treat with, the authors would be rewarded with a volley of arrows.

[101]

VII

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• (136) Living improved considerably and there was meat now in abundance: the banks of the Uraicoera were full of game. The best cuts were reserved for us,

AT HOME WITH THE SAMATARI

and brought to us already cooked, in a wrapping of some appropriate green stuff—a dish beyond compare. At times there was so much meat (cooked and eaten without salt or spices) that we willingly turned to fruit again. There was no lack of that either. (23)*
(263)

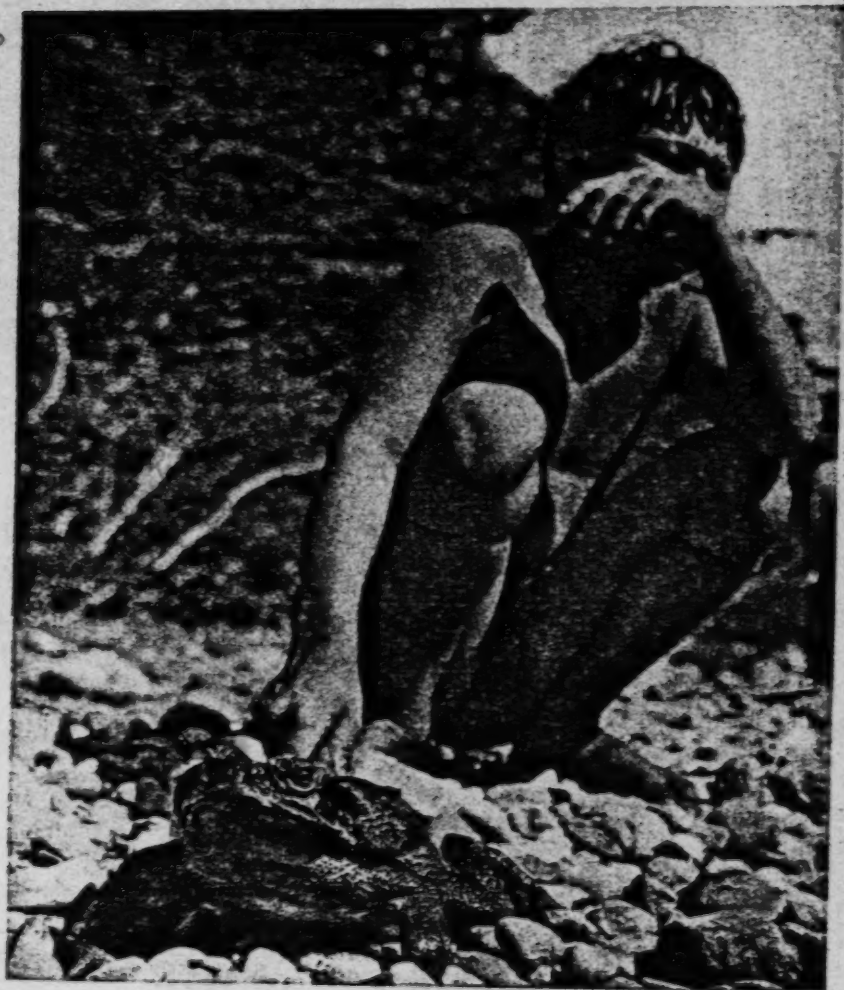
When a tapir or a number of peccaries have been killed and there is too much meat to be eaten up at once, the Samatari smoke it on a hurdle supported by four stakes driven into the ground. A fire is lit underneath and kept going all night—to the accompaniment of the medicine-man's ceaseless chanting. In the morning the pieces of meat, looking completely charred, are wrapped in wild banana leaves and entrusted for transport to some little woman who hoists them up along with the babies on her back. (482) 251

I have also seen a sloth being smoked. No gentler animal exists in the world. She moves at a speed which never exceeds a few yards a day, and lives hanging on the trees with her young ones clinging to the hairs of her back. They captured one alive, and with the machete chopped off the three nails of its hands and feet, to make scrapers and 'bodkins' for various uses. Deprived of her only means of defence, the sloth kept moving slowly along, with a resigned, human expression which quickly won our sympathy. But not the Samatari's. To them, a sloth is an excellent target for archery practice, because it will remain in the same position—clasp ing a pole, for instance, without moving—just the sort of thing you want for a target. The arrows whistled past the sloth's wet nose, but its face showed no change of expression; then some struck it, but not in a vital part, and its fur reddened with blood. The arrows did not penetrate deeply because they were only practice ones, with worn tips. Had I had a gun I would have shot it, for there was such a look of gentle reproof in the little animal's eyes that it became unendurable. But the gun was a long way off, and our five remaining cartridges had been the subject of so much calculation, that perhaps after all I wouldn't have ventured to expend one on this four-legged Saint Sebastian. Soon, however, too many arrows had struck, and before the youngsters could get it to play with and drag it about in the dust, still alive, I asked for the machete. Laughing, in order to evade Samatari susceptibilities, I struck it one hard blow on the head which sent it straight to the smoking-tray. (23)*
(251)
(237)
(412)

We now had a definite plan laid and were spreading propaganda to make it possible, Uarema and the Guayca Indians being our agents. We had now made the descent of the entire Aracua and part of the Uraricoera, and before reaching

6: Vinci T-5 (1950) 1959 SQ18 Yanoama SQ18
Sanema

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25. Sempronio brings his grand gift - a poisonous toad!

[p. 144 - 3]

RED CLOTH AND GREEN FOREST

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cannibalism. When someone dies in battle, or through some other violence—when he dies, that is, in the full prime of manhood—the body is cremated on a pyre and the ashes scrupulously gathered. Mixing these to a paste with water, they make a block which is wrapped in banana leaves and kept for the ceremony of the Drinking, by which they believe that the dead man's strength can enter their own bodies. Such ceremonies generally take place at large assemblies, people from neighbouring tribes also being present, and the festivities may last several days. Our Indians, however, wanting to assure a good augury for the voyage they were about to undertake with us, had limited themselves to a shortened version of the usual ceremony, since in these particular circumstances there was neither the time nor the opportunity for more.

II

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In three little canoes, two of them the property of Frenario's people, we went down the Yevarehuri, making for the point where it is joined by a slightly smaller, darker stream flowing from the south—the Matahuri. It had been raining ceaselessly for days and the rivers were overflowing their banks, which made it difficult to find a camping-place for the night.

On the second day we had two fair-sized falls to negotiate. The third day's paddling brought us to the Marahuri, but we left it to the right of us, its mouth being apparently quite blocked by fallen trees, and entered a smaller stream just to the south of it, which offered quiet water and a clearly defined course between the giant vegetation of both banks. The Shirians told us that this new waterway was called the Toroli—that is, the Turtle—and that we had only to go up to the source to find the track crossing the cordillera which led to the north side of the Upper Parima river.

● [136]

Our crew was hardly sufficient and progress was exasperatingly slow. Happily, there was plenty of game. Guans and curassow were plentiful, as well as monkeys and sloths—the Indians' favourite dish.

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Our head man was a real lead-slinger. From the first day onwards he complained of a pain in his foot which made him draw the line at heavy work. Under the drenching rains that fell with every interminable afternoon, he would sit in the middle of the canoe, and also in the middle of the bananas we were carrying, holding a palm frond over his head. If we urged him to do

THE TANG OF THE EARTH

we ate rice with butter. Evening found us a little higher up, in a featureless region. There were no streams, only dirty pools of mud and water tinged red with the clay. The track, inexplicably, was now taking us south-west, across lofty hills which grouped together were almost a cordillera in themselves.

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The absence of game was typical of the higher altitudes, marked too by the coldness of the nights and the incessant rain which fell both then and for the greater part of the day.

[136] •

From one steep slope, we suddenly saw the lowlands—a great valley lay spread before us, full of cloud. On its far border rose two enormously high peaks, conical in shape and completely covered with a greenish-black fuzz of forest. Over the leafy surface drifted soft veils of cloud, wafted on the rising breath of the valley. Through the trees nearer to me, I caught a glimpse of another, isolated, mountain almost lost in the clouds behind the two wooded peaks.

For a moment I had a deep awareness of the vast size of the forest: I absorbed it, as the roots of all growing things absorb the tang and savour of the very earth itself. Regions vaster than the life of a man! But more terrible than the vastness of the jungle was the vegetable life it supported—the expression of its universal power.

Euphorbia trees, with their soft wood and the nuts beloved of macaws, transforming that same tang of the earth, within their secret filters, into the white milky sap that rises like a tide to swell their bark. Giant *guaranah* trees, generously scattering their legions of seeds on the earth to kill them forthwith by their own shade—so that the hope of seeing some new young tree rise up to keep the old one company must go ever unfulfilled—a blind orgy of creation that leads only to the death of the young: until at last the old tree crashes down and a great patch of sky is thrown open and the sun's rays pour through, to nurse the little ones and raise them up to look out over the tossing waves of the forest surface. Sandalwoods, sweet-smelling as incense. *Tacamarcké*, distilling crystalline balsams in the chilly night. Cedars that the lightning splits as cleanly as an axe. Kapoks and Cecropiae, rapid in growth as if the very earth itself was swelling upwards to explode into the sun: light-timbered scatterers of seeds that are launched on the wind to bear the fecund message of their light-limbed race to every corner of the forest. *Annemane*, springy as steel, scored by their own store of bitter sap that holds back the milder, more insipid water. Ebony trees, acute in the hardness of their wood, the living outcrop of the mountain's

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Hygienic Measures

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Toilets for the elimination of excrement are absent. They consider the edge of the patio sufficiently far away for urination. To defecate they go into the forest at some distance from the settlement and away from the paths. An old fallen tree trunk is the preferred site for squatting down, and dry sticks take the place of toilet paper.

No one is capable of intentionally touching dung with the hand or foot. It is considered very dirty, and if one did touch it, his hand or foot must be cleaned and washed immediately.

The dung of dogs and of infants is removed from the patio by pushing it onto leaves with a stick and then throwing these leaves some distance into the forest.

For their nocturnal movements, they put a few leaves on the ground, with which they then make a package; on the following morning they throw them away at some distance from the settlement.

● (136)

In El Platanal there is a green beetle which buries hard dung. Half an hour after a movement all evidence disappears.

Sites

361

The center of the area in which the Guaika /Waica/ live is the "conuco." In the forest which surrounds the conuco are located their temporary or semipermanent settlements, this depending on the type of terrain, whether it is sandy or clayey.

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(136)

Very simple temporary dwellings are used in areas where the fleas or "niguas" are a problem. This type of house consists of a framework of beams for a roof, with leaves placed on top and held down. These same leaves can easily be taken to the site of a new settlement when the Indians move to another, uninfested area.

A more semipermanent type of construction is preferred where the "niguas" do not present a problem and make it impossible to return to the same site. These houses are of /461/ similar construction, but are larger and more durable, and the leaves of the roof are fixed in place. This type of dwelling or shelter takes about five times longer to build in comparison with the temporary type of dwelling.

To the Source of the Orinoco

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¹²³
[648] From this we deduced that the Waikas and the Guaharibos, although belonging to the same racial group, do not always live together in complete harmony.

142 Generally speaking, the Guaharibo is not as tall as the average white man. Though he is of slender build, his chest is thick-set and his arms are muscular and we attributed this to his regular use of his immensely powerful bow. His skin is lighter than that of the Makiritares and his eyes are brighter. His hair, too, is less dark and is cut with a fringe all round the head. Body hair is but feebly developed and the men are practically beardless. The two women in the boat were delicately made and quite pretty; they adopted a similar hairstyle to the men but rather longer. Their breasts, small and conical, contrasted with the opulent, hemispherical breasts of the Makiritare women. One of them was clearly the wife of the leader of the party; the other appeared to belong to one of the men with the charcoal-blackened face.

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123 Our Guaharibos very quickly became less suspicious, though they still kept close together. Each grasped his machete as though it were treasure, the women and children doing so, too. Hardly had they disembarked than they were assaulted by the *plaga*, which were always at their worst at this time of day. The unfortunate Guaharibos in their nakedness fell an easy prey to them and were soon hopping about and slapping themselves with their hands and the flat blades of the machetes. Obviously they had come from a less infested country, probably from the banks of a black water river.

• [136]

"General" Butrón, who had several times had contact with the Padamo Guaharibos—or at least with their cousins the Waikas—suddenly produced a bundle of incredible rags which he had picked up God-knows-where, and began to distribute them. The scene that followed was quite grotesque. The women were no more capable of putting on a dress than the men were of donning trousers. We had to dress them as if they were infants, and replace missing buttons by string. As soon as night fell and the *jejenes* left us in peace, they promptly discarded these embarrassing and tawdry impediments.

We made over to them a newly-built *ranchó* situated in the

Esmeralda to the Guaharibo Rapids

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Orinoco to the Guaharibo Rapids. On this the river's course is given in great detail, showing not only the major tributaries but a great many minor ones as well, though there is no indication of their size. From first-hand experience it was clear to us that the contribution of some of the lesser tributaries was anything but negligible. There are, for instance, the Iguapo, which joins the Orinoco from the right ten miles above Esmeralda after itself being joined by a river its own size, and another river, unnamed as far as I know, which has its mouth midway between the Padamo and the Ocamo. And entering from the other bank come the Lipe and the Icipe, of which the latter is eighty yards wide at the confluence. Of these four only the Iguapo has been explored and that by Diez de la Fuente.

Above the Mavaca the Orinoco's mean width is less than two hundred yards. Its general direction of flow is east to west with a slight northern tendency and surprisingly, since it nowhere else does so in its thousand miles journey from Mavaca to the sea, it twists and turns pronouncedly.

Since we had left Esmeralda the only birds we had seen were single specimens of black ibis, large kingfishers and droves of white egrets. The egrets would sit craning their necks in the trees and, as we approached, would fly up only to settle down a little farther away. It was as though no human being had ever disturbed their forests. Once or twice we saw a pair of otters diving from a rock or dead tree stump and once we shot at an anaconda which was placidly coiled round a tree. We watched as it slowly unwound and disappeared into the murky water.

That evening we took one of the *curiaras* up a small tributary and fished, but the spate was too strong. Instead of fish we gathered some forest cocoa whose pulp is a refreshing drink when newly made.

The First Waikas

The Padamo and Ocamo rivers are inhabited by Guaharibos. Above the Ocamo, the inhabitants of the Orinoco's banks call themselves Waikas. They closely resemble the Guaharibos we had met at Esmeralda but are, perhaps, a little more primitive. Some had had previous contact with Butrón's wood-cutters.

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To the Source of the Orinoco

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But ibis in immense droves refused to be disturbed as they covered each new sandbank that was born.

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The water was as clear as if it had been filtered, its reflection of the sun blinding. Dark patches of smooth water amid the rippled surface elsewhere betrayed the next sandbanks to uncover.

We left behind the Padamo, Ocamo and the Mavaca, and all the time the river got narrower. We passed the nights on great flat platforms of rock which got larger as the water went down; with machetes we killed fish trapped in the rocky pools left by the receding stream. A dish of ananas and fish, half-soup, half-stew, is very tasty. It is called *sancoco* and from now on became our staple diet.

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From Esmeralda we had brought supplies of sugar, coffee, salt, some oil and four big baskets of *manioc* from which we made coarse bread at all hours of the day. Several times we saw fresh water turtles clinging to the rocks and once or twice succeeded in catching one. But they are wily creatures and usually they dived before we could get near them. One we caught was handicapped by an injured foot which the men asserted was the work of a caribe. Unfortunately, it was too early for the females to be laying their eggs in the sand—they would have been manna, indeed.

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We arrived at Platanal on November 21st to find that the bridge had been cut down and learned that this had been deliberately done "for strategic reasons". The Indians greeted us like old friends and unhesitatingly took us to the village. There we found feverish activity on all sides. A boy had been kidnapped from the plantation and another killed by an arrow through the chest. The corpse had been cremated amid ritual weeping and the ashes stored by the family in an urn sealed by wax. Not until the death had been avenged could they be mixed with the dust of the lad's ancestors.

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The men had strengthened and consolidated the fortified enclosure and cut down the screen of trees round the village. Sentries had been posted and the entry through the fortification had been concealed by palm-leaves. Women were

4 · DOING FIELDWORK AMONG THE YANOMAMÖ

114 of them anxious to help me and honor bound to show any visitor the numerous courtesies of their system of etiquette. In short, they approached the image of primitive man that I had conjured up, and it was sheer pleasure to work with them. The recent work by Colin Turnbull (1966) brings out dramatically the contrast in personal characteristics of two African peoples he has studied.

Hence, what I say about some of my experiences is probably equally true of the experiences of many other fieldworkers. I write about my own experiences because there is a conspicuous lack of fieldwork descriptions available to potential fieldworkers. I think I could have profited by reading about the private misfortunes of my own teachers; at least I might have been able to avoid some of the more stupid errors I made. In this regard there are a number of recent contributions by fieldworkers describing some of the discomforts and misfortunes they themselves sustained.³ Students planning to conduct fieldwork are urged to consult them.

My first day in the field illustrated to me what my teachers meant when they spoke of "culture shock." I had traveled in a small, aluminum rowboat propelled by a large outboard motor for two and a half days. This took me from the Territorial capital, a small town on the Orinoco River, deep into Yanomamö country. On the morning of the third day we reached a small mission settlement, the field "headquarters" of a group of Americans who were working in two Yanomamö villages. The missionaries had come out of these villages to hold their annual conference on the progress of their mission work, and were conducting their meetings when I arrived. We picked up a passenger at the mission station, James P. Barker, the first non-Yanomamö to make a sustained, permanent contact with the tribe (in 1950). He had just returned from a year's furlough in the United States, where I had earlier visited him before leaving for Venezuela. He agreed to accompany me to the village I had selected for my base of operations to introduce me to the Indians. This village was also his own home base, but he had not been there for over a year and did not plan to join me for another three months. Mr. Barker had been living with this particular group about five years.

- [312] We arrived at the village, Sasasi-teri, about 2:00 PM and docked the boat along the muddy bank at the terminus of the path used by the Indians to fetch their drinking water. It was hot and muggy, and my clothing was soaked with perspiration. It clung
- [36] uncomfortably to my body, as it did thereafter for the remainder of the work. The small, biting gnats were out in astronomical numbers, for it was the beginning of the dry
- 114 season. My face and hands were swollen from the venom of their numerous stings. In
- 123 just a few moments I was to meet my first Yanomamö, my first primitive man. What would it be like? I had visions of entering the village and seeing 125 social facts running about calling each other kinship terms and sharing food, each waiting and anxious to have me collect his genealogy. I would wear them out in turn. Would they like me?
- [21] This was important to me; I wanted them to be so fond of me that they would adopt me into their kinship system and way of life, because I had heard that successful anthropologists always get adopted by their people. I had learned during my seven years of

³Maybury-Lewis 1967, "Introduction," and 1963a; Turnbull, 1966; L. Bohannan, 1964. Perhaps the most intimate account of the tribulations of a fieldworker is found in the posthumous diary of Bronislaw Malinowski (1957). Since the diary was not written for publication, it contains many intimate, very personal details about the writers' anxieties and hardships.


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Fig. 2-3. Men blowing ebene, a hallucinogenic drug, into each other's nostrils by means of a hollow tube.

SHELTER All house materials likewise come from the jungle: poles, vines, and leaves. The Yanomamö permanent house—*shabono*—is probably the most sophisticated manufacture produced by these people. Its construction requires considerable cooperation, planning, labor, and patience. Unfortunately, the *shabono* only lasts one or two years because the leaves begin to leak, or the entire village is burned to the ground in order to destroy the cockroaches, scorpions, spiders, and other vermin that infest the house. These can become such a nuisance that the roof is literally alive with bugs. Kqobawli's house was so badly infested at one point that the noise of thousands of scurrying roaches produced a constant, noticeable din in the village. Whenever someone got out of his hammock, the roof just above his head would suddenly come alive with roaches, disturbed by the movement below. As they scurried to safety, many of them would fall off, producing a shower of bugs on the occupants below. There were so many bugs that the increased activity above the moving person also increased the din, as if a sudden gust of wind had disturbed the dried leaves.

Each individual builds his own section of the *shabono*. The man usually does all the heavy work of locating and fetching poles for the frame, placing them into the ground or tying them overhead, and weaving the numerous leaves into the roof thatch. The wife helps by gathering the leaves and vines used in the construction.

The first step in building a new *shabono* is the selection of the site. This is usually some well-drained portion of the garden, such as a slight rise or hump.

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